HOUSE OF COMMONS
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# Board of Internal Economy

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TRANSCRIPT

## Thursday, May 24, 2018

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● (1120)

[*English*]

**Hon. Geoff Regan (Speaker of the House of Commons):** This meeting of the Board of Internal Economy is called to order. Good morning.

The first item we have is the minutes and business arising from the previous meeting.

Are there any comments or concerns about the minutes or any business arising from them? Hearing none we'll move on to the second item, the modernization of policies in the "Members' Allowances and Services Manual" and bylaws of the board.

Presenting from the House of Commons we have the Chief Financial Officer, Daniel Paquette, and also the Deputy Chief Financial Officer, José Fernandez.

Mr. Paquette.

**Mr. Daniel G. Paquette (Chief Financial Officer, House of Commons):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

[*Translation*]

Last December, I appeared here to propose a number of policy changes, which you then approved. I am back today to talk about our efforts to continue modernizing members' policies so that we can be better placed to assist members in carrying out their parliamentary functions.

I will first present a series of proposals to modernize members' travel policies, and then, a proposed change to the end-of-year deadlines.

[*English*]

The House administration recognized that members' parliamentary function entails long workdays and extended periods away from home. These requirements have led members to express their needs for changes to travel policies for themselves, their employees, and their immediate family. The House administration has also reviewed the report from the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs and took into consideration the recommendations for possible amendments to the travel points system that would encourage members' families to reunite with the members.

We have also consulted with various members and House officers to get a good understanding of the challenges we were asked to address. The presentation today will also follow up on the board's December 7 request to clarify the definition of "designated traveller".

[*Translation*]

After studying all the information we've compiled, the House administration proposes the following changes to the members' policies and by-laws on travel. The purpose of these changes is to ensure that all members receive the necessary resources to travel for their parliamentary functions.

[*English*]

The proposed amendments seek to promote a family-friendly environment for members of the House, enhance the support provided to members in the discharge of their parliamentary functions, clarify certain elements to increase members' policy understanding, and allow them to optimize the use of their resources.

The travel points system was introduced to ensure that all members have equal access to the travel resources no matter the size or location of their constituencies. It was also intended to respond to members' needs by providing resources to their employees and to immediate families. These travel resources are not only used by members, but they are also used by their designated travellers and their dependants. Today nearly half the members are parents of dependent children, and the travel resources required to maintain a balanced family life are creating pressures on members' travel allocations.

Currently half a point is deducted for each round trip taken by a member's dependant under the age of six and a point for each round trip taken by other authorized travellers. Our first proposal is to increase flexibility for the travel of younger dependants. We recommend that no points be deducted for the travel of dependants under the age of six nor for dependants with disabilities. One travel point would continue to be deducted for each round trip taken by other eligible dependants. Additionally, we've proposed to allocate additional regular points to members with more than one dependant of the age of six to 20. To alleviate the pressures on the travel resources of members whose families are larger than the Canadian average, the proposal would be to have eight regular points allocated for each additional dependant who is between the ages of six and 20.

[*Translation*]

Given that no travel points will be deducted from dependants with disabilities, or dependants under the age of six, no additional points will be allocated to them.

Furthermore, no additional points will be allocated to dependants between the ages of 21 and 25, because our data on the use of points does not show that this age category is putting a strain on members' travel resources.

[*English*]

On another matter, there is one additional element we are also looking to update to further clarify the eligibility of dependants for using members' travel resources. For each dependant who is in the student status category, we recommend that the members also provide at least annually the name and location of the educational institution at which the student is enrolled.

We believe these amendments to the travel policies will foster a more family-friendly environment in the House to support members in the fulfillment of their parliamentary functions, and by encouraging their families to use travel points to reunite with them.

[*Translation*]

The following proposal concerns designated travellers. During the December 7, 2017, meeting, the board said that it needed more clarity around the definition of designated travellers. The scope of this definition has changed over the years to adapt to members' evolving needs and realities.

● (1125)

[*English*]

To clarify the current definition, the House administration is proposing the following wording for the definition of designated travellers: Members may designate one person as a designated traveller to support them in their parliamentary functions. A designated traveller is typically the spouse or partner of the member. Members may not designate their employees or another member who is not their spouse or partner.

Another proposal relating to the designated traveller is the current one-year declaration rule. Currently, members must declare the name of their designated traveller, which remains in effect for 12 months or for the duration of the Parliament, whichever is shorter. Since members' situations and needs can evolve during this period, we recommend adding a provision to allow the chief financial officer, upon receipt of a special request, to permit a change in the declaration of designated traveller sooner, under certain circumstances, including death, divorce, or other significant life events.

[*Translation*]

The following policy change broadens the scope of travel authorized as members' regular travel. According to the current policy, regular travel is defined as travel between Ottawa and one's constituency. However, members regularly travel both within their constituencies and to large, neighbouring cities for their parliamentary functions, and often rely on the support of their staff.

The current practice consists in using special points for this kind of travel, which puts a strain on both the travel allocation and the ability to carry out certain parliamentary functions.

[*English*]

Therefore, we propose to expand the definition of regular trips to also include trips within the member's constituency and travel to the member's provincial or territorial capital. This means that all travel within the constituency would use regular rather than special points. Members may still use 25 of their points for special trips, which are trips in Canada other than those that are covered by the newly expanded definition of regular trips.

Members would now be provided with improved ability to travel within their constituencies, to and from Ottawa, and elsewhere, to discharge their parliamentary functions.

Another recommendation concerns family reunification. We want to clarify the policy's intent to specify the time and place in which reunification takes place. We recommend that a new guiding principle specify that the family reunification typically occurs while the House is in session, either at the member's secondary residence or another location where the member is exercising his or her parliamentary functions.

[*Translation*]

Finally, we are proposing to specify that authorized travellers can use travel points to join members travelling in their capacity as ministers, but only in two circumstances: First, if members are simultaneously carrying out a parliamentary function, and, second, when the House is sitting and the members' combined functions don't allow them to return to their principal residences.

[*English*]

Finally, given all the changes occurring in the travel industry, we are putting forward recommendations concerning additional eligible travel expenses. One recommendation would include class of travel, while a second covers pre-approval of travel programs. A third recommendation considers lawful alternative commercial accommodations or transportation services. The fourth recommendation concerns in-flight wireless Internet.

Regarding the class in which members are authorized to travel, we recommend specifying that members and their authorized travellers may use the most economical transportation available, regardless of the class of travel. To be more specific, members and their authorized travellers must travel at the class that they are entitled to, unless a higher class of travel is available at lower class fares. Members are encouraged to book such flights through our members' travel services, since doing so offers numerous benefits, such as substantial savings for the flight costs, corporate flight pass, and accident and other travel insurance.

Concerning the pre-approved travel programs, lawful alternative accommodations and transportation services, and the wireless Internet during travel, we propose to allow such costs to be charged to the member's office budget with supporting documentation.

[*Translation*]

These changes will enhance members' abilities to travel both within their constituency and to their corresponding provincial or territorial capital, which will allow them to better serve their constituents. The changes would also simplify the family reunification principle to provide better understanding and allocation of the resources so that members can be together with their families.

● (1130)

[*English*]

Before I go to questions on these changes, I would also like to take the opportunity to speak briefly on the other proposal, to amend the year-end timelines for June 30 to submit previous-year claims. To alleviate time pressures related to current processes for submitting previous year claims, we recommend that the chief financial officer be empowered to establish the date by which all accounts relating to a given fiscal year must be received in order for them to be eligible for reimbursement. This would allow members more flexibility to submit claims from the previous fiscal year against the current year's member's office budget while still respecting the prior year's limits included in the members' policies.

[*Translation*]

This change would optimize resources by offering members and staff more flexibility. It would also improve the efficiency of the claim process, and prevent members from having to pay out-of-pocket expenditures that would have been admissible.

Mr. Speaker, I hope this presentation clearly shows that the recommendations support an environment that is beneficial to both families and the House, facilitate members' understanding of the policies, and enhance the House administration's ability to assist members in their work.

I will be glad to answer any questions the board members may have.

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** Thank you very much, Mr. Paquette.

Mr. Rodriguez, the floor is yours.

**Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Chief Government Whip):** First of all, I have a comment, and then, a very brief question.

My comment is more along the lines of praise, because I wish to thank you, Mr. Paquette and Mr. Fernandez, as well as your team. I think that you have managed to assess the members' needs in terms of their families, generally speaking, because we are all members, and we all have families. You have also managed to assess our needs as parliamentarians, in terms of travel. On behalf of the members and ministers of the Liberal caucus, I wish to acknowledge your sensitivity to these issues, and thank you for it.

My question is very brief. It only concerns the last part of your presentation, since I think we all agree on the first part.

When you set a date for members to submit all of their receipts and claims, do many members submit them only after the financial year is over? Do many of them still have unsubmitted claims at that time, and end up paying their expenditures out of pocket? Is this rather uncommon?

**Mr. Daniel G. Paquette:** We currently have about 100 of such claims, which we end up denying. Many people understand the reimbursement policy, so we aren't aware of the number of unsubmitted claims.

Some members did agree to pay out-of-pocket expenditures related to their parliamentary functions.

**Hon. Pablo Rodriguez:** Thank you.

[*English*]

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** Mr. Strahl.

**Mr. Mark Strahl (Chief Opposition Whip):** I have several questions. I don't know how we want to do this, but maybe I'll just start at the recommendations page and roll through some of the concerns or questions I have.

Point 1a says "no point is deducted for dependants with disabilities". What definition is used to define disability? Is that on the word of the member? Is that a diagnosis from a medical professional? Is it eligibility for the disability tax credit? What are you using to define a dependant with a disability?

**Mr. Daniel G. Paquette:** There is already a definition of disability in our guidelines and our policies, which is supported by our CHRO. I am sure that it is based on some of the other examples you've provided here, so it's not a guestimate; it's really based on a definition.

**Mr. Mark Strahl:** That's defined. Thank you.

Under 2c are eight additional points for each additional dependant between the age of six and 20, and that was for more than one.

**Mr. Daniel G. Paquette:** That's right.

**Mr. Mark Strahl:** Are those eight points assigned specifically to said additional dependant, or do they simply go into the member's greater pool and they can be used for whatever purpose the member wishes, and the fact that the member has more than one child gives the member more travel points?

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** Before you answer that, I've asked our Director of Human Resources to see if he can get the definition of disability for you during the meeting.

**Mr. Mark Strahl:** Thank you.

**Mr. Daniel G. Paquette:** I'm sorry, I lost my train of thought. What was the question?

● (1135)

**Mr. Mark Strahl:** Are the additional eight travel points assigned to a specific dependant, or do they simply go into a larger pool for a member who has more children?

**Mr. Daniel G. Paquette:** The intent was to put it in the general pool, but to monitor to make sure that there is usage for family reunification. It was not going to be a hard control in monitoring. At this point, the members who will be getting these extra points have identified the need to use them for this purpose. If there was to be any kind of other use, we would bring it to the attention of the board.

**Mr. Mark Strahl:** Regarding the designated traveller, dependants.... Did you look at any other restrictions? We have employees and not another member. Were there other cases where there were concerns raised, such as people choosing an employee of a registered party or things of that nature, or were those not really explored?

**Mr. Daniel G. Paquette:** We haven't really dug into a lot of detail. It hasn't been an issue. The designated travellers are disclosed on the site. The intent that the designated traveller is the spouse or partner is respected at this point, in all cases.

If there's a need to have additional restrictions, we are open to adding those to the list.

**Mr. Mark Strahl:** As for 3b, I assume that the chief financial officer would come back to the board when they have developed the policy and the review process. It says here on 3b to allow the chief financial officer to formalize the process to review. Would that come back to the board, or are we giving our authority today to allow him to develop the policy that we will be bound by?

**Mr. Daniel G. Paquette:** I think the intent was to allow the steps to do this. It's really just the steps of which form would be submitted and identifying the life events that would allow for a change within a shorter period of time.

**Mr. Mark Strahl:** Okay.

**Mr. Daniel G. Paquette:** Typically, it would be the significant life events that would warrant the need to change the designated traveller.

**Mr. Mark Strahl:** Okay.

In point 5, on family reunification travel, I have a concern about the provision—both for members of Parliament and ministers and parliamentary secretaries—that this is somehow restricted. I know it's travel principles and not a policy, but as was indicated at the beginning of this presentation, we don't go on holidays on June 25. Members in all parties carry out duties not only in their ridings, but across the country. Certainly ministers and parliamentary secretaries do when the House is not in session. I would have a concern that we be careful that we not eliminate the ability of members to conduct their business, at times with their families, during the summer or winter breaks, or on break weeks. That's a concern.

Also, allowing financial management or the House of Commons to make a judgment call that the combined duration of parliamentary and ministerial duties did not allow the member to return home.... I think it should be at the discretion of the member whether or not their schedule...it's better, for their family or themselves, to have their family travel with them. We're not the party that currently has to worry about ministers and parliamentary secretaries, but their primary function is still as a member of Parliament. Even though they might be carrying out operations or business for the Government of Canada as a minister of the crown, I think we should be very careful that we are not discouraging them from maintaining their family relationships, and we are allowing that travel to occur without undue restrictions.

I do have a concern about both of these sections talking about when the House of Commons is in session, and for discouraging ministers and parliamentary secretaries from using their parliamentary travel points as members when they are also doing ministerial or parliamentary secretary work.

● (1140)

**Mr. Daniel G. Paquette:** On the first point, we had a clarification of a question we had from another member yesterday. The House is in session from the Speech from the Throne, or when there's a prorogation or a writ, so what it includes is a lot broader.

**Mr. Mark Strahl:** Okay.

**Mr. Daniel G. Paquette:** It's not when the House is sitting; it's when the House is in session. I can clarify from that perspective.

**Mr. Mark Strahl:** Got it.

**Mr. Daniel G. Paquette:** The idea here of asking the members to identify the parliamentary function or the limitations is that the guiding principles do exist for travel, and this allows us to ask the member to provide us with that explanation. We never challenge it. Yes, it is the member's prerogative in terms of what a parliamentary function is and all that. This way here, we know that we can document our files and make sure that we, or my staff who process the claims, have the information to support the claims and the payments.

The idea here is that unless there's something really unusual, our fundamental principle is not to challenge the member but to make sure that we document the files so that we have everything to support the payment, respecting the principles.

**Mr. Mark Strahl:** Thank you for that clarification. I apologize for the misunderstanding there.

Finally, I would just ask if you have surveyed members or would consider surveying members on this. I know that many members have raised the number of travel points as a concern for family reunification. I would submit to this group that dividing out and reporting on the travel costs of a dependant is actually more of a disincentive to travel than is the travel points system. I think we should consider whether that has been a good innovation or not to have an MP's children's specific travel costs. It is, quite frankly, a target for media scrutiny. When the year-end reports come out, that is one of the things, i.e., whose dependants have travelled the most with a member. I think that does more to discourage it than the points system or anything like that.

Perhaps that's for us to consider in future business. We all want transparency and accountability. I'm quite happy as a member of Parliament to take on all of that responsibility for my dependants, and my designated traveller even, but I know that it hasn't been the practice the last couple of years.

I would just flag it. I've talked to a number of members who hesitate to travel with their families, even when they probably should, because they are targeted for doing so.

**Mr. Daniel G. Paquette:** We're hoping that the additional emphasis on family reunification in policies will help members alleviate that concern. But yes, we do understand. It was brought to our attention. We can look into maybe other options at another point to address that.

**Mr. Mark Strahl:** Thank you.

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** Thank you, Mr. Strahl.

Ms. Bergen.

**Hon. Candice Bergen (House Leader of the Official Opposition):** Thank you.

I have just a couple of points. My colleague, Mark Strahl, actually mentioned a lot of what I was going to mention.

I think the reason we want to make changes and make some of these things more, as we said, family-friendly is that we want to attract good people, including women, to politics. We want them to feel that their lives will not be completely disrupted and that they won't be isolated from the people they love.

I would just say that we're fixing some of the rules so that it's easier. However, I think that what we're doing is still making it so that people—as you said, Mark—are still thinking that maybe they shouldn't have their family member come. In the case where maybe they're individuals who aren't married or who don't have a partner and maybe their children are grown, they also need to have some support from family and people they love.

I'm not sure how we address that so that this system isn't abused, but I think that in the spirit of what we want to accomplish, maybe we need to give thought to how we help people to be able to be supported and do the job, and it's not just directly their immediate children or family members. That's something that we can maybe think about.

With that in mind, I am wondering why we need to define the designated traveller as typically the spouse or partner of the member. I know there have been previous times where a single person maybe has made a parent a designated traveller. I think that's happened. I just wonder if there is a reason why we want to say that it has to be spouse or a partner. That's my one question.

Then, back to my original point, I would still say that when ministers or parliamentary secretaries are out doing their jobs, that is a parliamentary function. I understand that you're saying that we're just going to ask them. However, there have been actual cases where ministers have been given a lot of problems because they brought their children on a trip, and they apparently weren't given the correct definition of "parliamentary travel". I'm still concerned about that. I think that, again, in the spirit of what we're trying to do, we need to either change the rules so that it makes your job easier.... However, if the minister or parliamentary secretary is actually travelling with their portfolio, that is parliamentary work. They are a member of Parliament. I think we need to clarify that.

Thank you.

● (1145)

**Mr. Daniel G. Paquette:** With regard to your first question about why it's the spouse or partner, I guess by using the word "typically" we know that there are going to be exceptions to this. Looking at the history of what a designated traveller has been—and we really have gone back—there was a point when there were various categories, and those categories were streamlined to family members or spouse. We went to the term "designated traveller" to avoid the reference just to "spouse" and to not be as general. It's always been related to the immediate family, though. We stayed within the frame of the history of the designated traveller process, so we thought we had addressed a bit of that concern by making it clearer while offering the options of special circumstances that may need to be accommodated here or there. If the board members here feel that we need to address it further, we can definitely take a look at it.

I think the responsibility for making sure that what the ministers do is part of their parliamentary function is well understood, and we can try to address it in the application of what's here. If we feel that it's not working well, we'll come back and make sure that we streamline this even better so that it's well understood in clarity and not just in application.

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** I wonder, then, if we can look at this list of recommendations because it seems that there are some concerns regarding numbers 2, 3, and 5. Before we go to those, is it the view of the board that it wants to accept recommendations 1, 4 and 6?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** Let's go back just for a moment to whether we need to set the others aside or what we need to do with them.

With regard to number two on the travel points allocation and the question of the eight additional points and so forth, Mr. Strahl, both you and Ms. Bergen had concerns about that. Is it your view that we need to set that aside, or is there some other approach you see us taking?

**Mr. Mark Strahl:** I believe the answer I received satisfied my concerns about that. I am assured that members won't simply be using these points for their own travel, but that it will be for their family members.

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** Okay, thank you.

Then let's go to 3a, where it says "maintain the current definition and clarify that the designated traveller is typically the spouse or partner of the Member;"

Do members wish to proceed with number 3 without "a", or leave it for now and consider this in the future? What's the will of the board in relation to number 3? Is it okay as is it for the moment and we'll come back to it?

**Hon. Candice Bergen:** I don't know why we have to add it. I'm not sure what the purpose is. Unless there's been a reason, why are we adding it?

I don't know what everyone else—

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** Well, unless there's agreement, obviously we don't proceed with it.

It sounds like your view would be that we not proceed, at least for now, with number 3, and then if the board became satisfied that it did wish to do that, it could do so in the future.

Mr. Paquette, is any clarification necessary on that?

**Mr. Daniel G. Paquette:** It was here to help with clarity for the board members. We're open to suggestions and to move forward accordingly.

● (1150)

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** Okay.

Let me just ask whether 3b and 3c are acceptable.

I'm seeing yes on that.

**Mr. Mark Strahl:** Yes.

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** I think we will set aside 3a, and it would not go forward for now at least. If the board wishes to go forward with it later, that's fine.

We're on to number 5.

We had, first of all, the question of "is in session". Of course, there's the parliamentary definition of what I think they had in mind here, which does cause some confusion.

If we go forward with this, that can be addressed in the wording of the changes to the bylaws, of course—

**Mr. Daniel G. Paquette:** Yes.

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** —to be very clear. Other than that, is number 5 acceptable? Do members wish to proceed with number 5?

**Hon. Pablo Rodriguez:** Yes.

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** Okay, then, I guess we have clarification of which recommendations are accepted by the board, and we can go on to the next item.

[*Translation*]

The next topic is the House officers' expenditures disclosure reports. The main presenters are again Mr. Paquette and Mr. Fernandez.

Mr. Paquette, the floor is yours.

[*English*]

**Mr. Daniel G. Paquette:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[*Translation*]

I will now take the time to ask the board to approve the templates of the House officers' expenditure reports, which will have to be published.

[*English*]

The publication of House officers' expenditures disclosure reports reflects the board's ongoing commitment to increased transparency and accountability.

[*Translation*]

Your approval of the templates of these reports of officers' expenditures in carrying out their parliamentary functions is one of the most important aspects of publishing these reports.

[*English*]

At its meeting on June 8, 2017, the board approved disclosure of expenditures for the Speaker and the other presiding officers, opposition leaders, House leaders, whips, national caucus chairs, national caucus research officer, and members who were former prime ministers.

The first House officer expenditure report will present a summary of expenses by category, and will cover the period of April 1, 2017 to March 31, 2018. The summary report to be disclosed in June will include for each House officer, their name, caucus, role, and the period of time in which they held the role for that particular fiscal year. The report will also include for each House officer, the total expenses by category, so their employee salaries, service contracts, travel, hospitality, and office expenses.

Starting in fiscal year 2018-19, expenses will be disclosed on a quarterly basis, within three months of the end of each quarter. The first quarter's House officer expenditure reports will be published by September 30, 2018. These quarterly reports will not only have the summary expenditure reports that I just explained, but will also have the detailed travel expenditure reports and detailed hospitality expenditure reports.

[*Translation*]

This graph here shows the templates of the officers' expenditure reports, the detailed reports of their travel expenditures and the detailed reports of their hospitality expenditures. If the board approves the proposed templates, the House administration will publish the officers' expenditure reports, based on the format presented today, on June 30, 2018, at the latest, as scheduled.

[*English*]

The publication of this report will benefit House officers by demonstrating the responsible management of taxpayer funds, highlight the board's commitment to transparency and accountability, and build a general public knowledge of House officers.

Mr. Speaker, I'm confident that these mock-ups proposed meet the intentions of the board.

[*Translation*]

I can now answer the board members' questions.

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** Thank you very much, Mr. Paquette.

Mr. Rodriguez, the floor is yours.

**Hon. Pablo Rodriguez:** Thank you very much.

How do we take a change of mandate during the year into account? When there is a change in officers of the House, how are the expenditures accounted for?

**Mr. Daniel G. Paquette:** The expenditures are charged to the officer in office. All expenditures accumulated before the change in officer are charged to the person who was in office at the time.

**Hon. Pablo Rodriguez:** So, the expenditures are charged to the person in office?

**Mr. Daniel G. Paquette:** Yes.

**Hon. Pablo Rodriguez:** In any given year's report, there can be two chief government whips.

**Mr. Daniel G. Paquette:** Yes. That is why there is a category to determine when officers were in office in any given financial year. We know if things have changed during the year.

**Hon. Pablo Rodriguez:** How is it different from a member's expenditures report?

**Mr. Daniel G. Paquette:** It's very similar, but perhaps has slightly fewer details. Officers don't have the same operating expenditures as constituency offices, which advertise at the level of

[*English*]

House officers, ten percenters,

● (1155)

[*Translation*]

and so on. These categories don't exist because there are no expenditures of this nature.

**Hon. Pablo Rodriguez:** So, all expenditures, without exception, are charged to the officers. For example, if the chief of staff or those organizing a special caucus make expenditures, these expenditures will be listed under the officers' name.

**Mr. Daniel G. Paquette:** Expenditures are charged to the office held by the officer. They are part of the expenditures required for carrying out a support function in Parliament.

**Hon. Pablo Rodriguez:** Okay, thank you.

[*English*]

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** Mr. Strahl.

**Mr. Mark Strahl:** Perhaps the whips have the most concerns here.

There are a number of functions and budgets that are captured under the whip, and I know there are perhaps some changes coming forward on this, but for instance, for the entire official opposition operation, the technology fund comes under the whip's budget.

Is that laid out in the reporting, all that this covers? Pablo mentioned special caucus meetings, etc. We provide monies to the national caucus chair for different things, but that would all be reported back under the whip's budget. Is that correct?

**Mr. Daniel G. Paquette:** The national caucus chair is a separate group that would be reflected in a separate report for that responsibility.

For the other piece, we're presenting total expenditures by category for the role. The actual breakdown of the nature of the budgets is in the policy. The policy describes which categories of budget are there. We're not doing the breakdown of each one of those by category in the disclosure.

**Mr. Mark Strahl:** Okay. Thank you.

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** Thank you very much.

Is it the will of the board to approve this recommendation?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** Thank you very much, Mr. Paquette and Mr. Fernandez.

[*English*]

Now we're going to continue with constituency office computer standardization, which is the next item. The presenters for this next session will be Stéphan Aubé, Chief Information Officer, and Louis Lefebvre, Senior Director of Strategic Initiatives.

**Mr. Stéphan Aubé (Chief Information Officer, House of Commons):** Thank you, Mr. Speaker and members of the board.

[*Translation*]

We are here to present to you an initiative that the House administration would like to put forward in the weeks to come. Specifically, we want to provide members with a level of service in their constituency offices that is comparable to the one provided to them in their offices here, on the Hill. We want to standardize the PCs, the computer equipment and the software in members' constituency offices to offer them a higher level of service.

[*English*]

This will also allow the House administration to strengthen the IT security posture in the offices. We'll also be able to provide turnkey services for support in the constituency offices, which you don't have right now.

The ultimate goal is also to enhance the customer experience that you have in the constituency offices. The goal would be that a member's office on the Hill and the constituency office would act as one office. In the constituency offices you would be be able to get the same services that you have here on the Hill for your staff who are in the constituency offices. That's the ultimate goal that we want to provide.

[*Translation*]

All of this is now available thanks to the investments we've made in your constituency offices since the 2016-2017 year. The aim of these investments was to improve the quality of the network in the constituency offices.

We are now able to offer you remote service. That was our stated objective.

● (1200)

[*English*]

The approach we're proposing for this initiative is to launch a pilot with 60 constituency offices. The choice of the constituency offices would be made in consultation with the whips' offices. That would basically identify the offices that would participate in it.

[*Translation*]

By November, we hope to get the necessary feedback from members, and identify their particular needs. If the pilot phase is conclusive and we get positive feedback from the members, we will recommend that all of the constituency offices move forward with this so that it can be implemented before the next election.

In the years to come, we want to provide members, following their election, with the computers they will use both on the Hill and in their constituency offices. The life-cycles of constituency office computers will now be aligned with those on the Hill, meaning at the start of elections.

[*English*]

This concludes the quick presentation, Mr. Speaker. We'll open it up for questions or any concerns that you have.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** Thank you very much, Mr. Aubé.

We will now go to Mr. Rodriguez.

**Hon. Pablo Rodriguez:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Aubé, Mr. Lefebvre, thank you for being here.

I think that this is a very good initiative. Constituencies face a great deal of challenges, and some face more than others. We will have to make sure that the pilot project includes a mix of urban, semi-urban and rural constituencies.

How many computers are we talking about for the constituency offices? Is it all the computers in the constituency offices?

**Mr. Stéphan Aubé:** We're trying to provide a maximum of five computers to each constituency office. The type of computer will be determined after consulting with the constituency offices. For example, if members want Surface tablets, standard office computers or portable microcomputers, we will give them those options. The number of computers provided will depend primarily on the number of employees in each constituency office.

**Hon. Pablo Rodriguez:** Will you take the old computers back?

**Mr. Stéphan Aubé:** Members will have the option of keeping their old computers. We will meet with the constituency offices, and, depending on how old these computers are and how they are configured, we will give them options on what they can do.

As you know, constituency offices do not currently have the same level of service as on the Hill. This is due to the fact that the computers do not meet the standards needed to connect them to the Hill's infrastructure.

**Hon. Pablo Rodriguez:** Essentially, for the members who will benefit from this pilot project—and everyone else, afterwards—it will be a bit like being in Ottawa, but in their constituencies. We will have the same type of interface. Being in our constituencies will be like being here. We will have direct access. What a great feature.

By when will you need the names of the constituencies?

**Mr. Stéphan Aubé:** If everyone agrees, we would like to move forward with this in the coming weeks. We will probably meet with you next week, because we want to work on this.

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** Ms. Brosseau, the floor is yours.

**Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (House Leader of the New Democratic Party):** Thank you very much, Mr. Aubé and Mr. Lefebvre, for your presentations.

I think that all of our constituency office staffers will be really excited to participate in this initiative, especially in the pilot project, following the 2019 election.

I represent a rural constituency, but it isn't too far from Montreal or Quebec City. We often have problems with our computers, which are tools we need to do our work and serve our constituents.

[*English*]

This is going to come into effect after the 2019 election. I'm just wondering, why do a pilot project? I think a lot of the staff would be looking forward to having an opportunity to get better computers and make sure that when we do have problems with our networks or our computers, there is immediate interaction with the IT, which is always great—the phone calls we make with the IT. They would look forward to having somebody come and deal with the problems directly on the computer, like the services we have here in the House.

**Mr. Stéphan Aubé:** As I said, our goal is to start with the pilot because we want to get feedback. Also, we want to learn from that pilot. We want to learn as it relates to the support model because, as you know, we will be supporting you remotely, and we also need to establish agreements with partners across Canada in order to support the different regions. Our goal is to do that in the next six months, and then after that we would plan the work necessary to be ready for the next election.

● (1205)

**Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau:** A lot of the offices have more than five computers. It doesn't matter where you are in Canada. We sometimes have a lot of volunteers. Why just five computers, and not more?

**Mr. Stéphan Aubé:** The number has actually been established on the average number of staff that exist across the different constituencies. You're right that some offices have more than five PCs, so this is why we set the number at a maximum of five.

Having said that, the five will be funded from the House administration. If a member chooses to have more PCs with the same approach, they'll be able to purchase more PCs through their MOBs. We would allow constituency offices to have six, seven, or eight if that would be required, as long as over and above five would be funded by the constituency offices.

**Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau:** There are 60 offices that will be able to participate, I guess. What would be the breakdown by party, and how would that work with the independents, too?

**Mr. Stéphan Aubé:** The way we usually do this is we use the proportional representation based on the election.

**Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau:** We like that.

**Mr. Stéphan Aubé:** That's been the long-standing procedure of how we do this.

**Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau:** Okay. Thank you.

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** I would like to clarify one thing. I want to bring the board members' attention to the last point on the screen. It says:

> If the pilot is successful, we will return to the Board—

—this would be the administration—

> —as part part of the Main Estimates process in order to ensure full implementation in the remaining constituency offices prior to the new Parliament.

**Mr. Stéphan Aubé:** Yes, sir.

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** I suppose that could be, theoretically, after the election but it could be before the next election.

**Mr. Stéphan Aubé:** Yes.

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** Okay.

Mr. Strahl.

**Mr. Mark Strahl:** Could you remind us what the current arrangement is for members providing computers in their own constituency offices? Are any of them currently covered through the central budget, or are those all the responsibility of the members' office budgets?

**Mr. Stéphan Aubé:** The past practice, sir, has always been that the members, from their own budgets, would be supplying their constituency offices' PCs. This was the past practice.

Having said that, the landscape of the IT supply chain, you might say, has changed a whole lot over the years from the small stores now to the large Best Buy stores, so we feel that we would be better suited to support the members, from a cost-efficiency perspective, if we supplied them with PCs directly from the Hill, because we have larger buying power and will be able to help.

If they still choose to purchase some of their equipment in their own riding, we will support them. The only impact is the level of service. What we're planning to do is to offer different tiers of services based on the security postures of the equipment being selected by the members, sir.

**Mr. Mark Strahl:** Were the five across both offices or just in the constituency?

**Mr. Stéphan Aubé:** This proposal of five is just for the constituency offices—a maximum of five.

**Mr. Mark Strahl:** Thank you.

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** Monsieur LeBlanc.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard):** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you for the work that you're doing.

I completely agree with our colleagues. I find that following the recommendations and the process you've provided has been helpful to us in many respects. My question is mostly on security issues. You've probably dealt with issues that have caused our colleagues concern on a number of occasions in their constituency offices. On the topic of security and data protection, I imagine that these computers contain an enormous amount of private information on the people who come to visit us in our constituency offices.

Are your concerns around security, or even vulnerability, going up? It's not just a matter of thinking about specific incidents.

If, as the Speaker mentioned, a future internal economy committee should ultimately decide to standardize or centralize the devices, computers and security resources in constituency offices, I hope that these changes will lead to a drop in costs. That would make sense. I hadn't thought of that, since I was focused on the security issue.

In going forward with this standardization, depending on the results of the pilot project, and based on your experience, would you say that the level of security and protection will increase?

Have we properly understood this?

● (1210)

**Mr. Stéphan Aubé:** I don't want to go into detail about the various security issues we face in the constituency offices, but it is definitely one of the main reasons why we want to provide this service. In the last two years, we have spent a lot of time consulting members on their needs, and we have received a good deal of requests. The members want help to be available, directly from their constituency offices, in order to configure, maintain and secure their systems. A number of members even ask us how we can help them at home.

They are increasingly on the move, and ask us for access to the House infrastructure. They want to be protected wherever their schedules and annual travels take them. That is why we want to give them this option when they travel to different regions. We want to provide them with a security service in their constituency offices that is on par with the one provided on the Hill. That is one of the main reasons why we want to move forward with these changes.

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc:** Thank you very much.

[*English*]

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** We have found that cybersecurity is a concern for numerous parliaments around the world these days.

Madam Chagger.

**Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons):** Thank you.

I would ask if the five computers that are going to be set up in the constituencies moving forward will always be the responsibility of the House and will not be coming out of the member's budget anymore.

**Mr. Stéphan Aubé:** That is the approach we're proposing here.

**Hon. Bardish Chagger:** That would actually provide some consistency in making sure that the MP would be ready to go when there is turnover or whatever the case is.

**Mr. Stéphan Aubé:** That is one of the big reasons, Madam Chagger. Sometimes some of the members have had equipment that has been much older than that of other members. When a member is elected, the process is that they inherit the equipment of the previous member at each election. We will be able now to alleviate all these problems and allow the member to be productive right away. Now the plan would be to life-cycle them at every election. When a new member comes in, they would be productive right away because they have new machines and they won't have to worry about supplying themselves with the PCs in their offices. We'll do that for them.

**Hon. Bardish Chagger:** That's good because then the MP already has...it's so overwhelming. I can relate because I know the equipment I received on coming into office delayed my being able to provide support to my constituents. The Hill office, however, did have the support and the system. I think this is a great opportunity.

Are you suggesting that the lifespan of the computer would be from election to election?

**Mr. Stéphan Aubé:** Yes, that's what we're proposing. The normal lifespan for the PCs we use on the Hill from a security perspective is between four and five years. This is why we're aligning this with elections. We know the time now and we can prepare for that.

**Hon. Bardish Chagger:** There is one thing I would ask, for confirmation and clarification. Does that mean a document that my team in Waterloo is working on will be able to be shared with my team on the Hill without it having to be emailed?

**Mr. Stéphan Aubé:** Yes, that's exactly what we're trying to avoid.

**Hon. Bardish Chagger:** It's a way to bring us into the 21st century. It is a small world, and we need to embrace technology. I think the security concerns are real, and I'm glad that you're taking care of them. I think the pilot project is exactly the way to go. Our country's regional diversity is a reality, so it's important to ensure that rural and remote areas as well as urban centres are able to work with the system. I'm glad that you consulted. Now we can see that we've listened and are acting, but I do think the pilot project is the right way to go to have a second-level approach before we implement it across the board so that we know it is the right approach.

I thank you for your work, and I look forward to, I hope, being chosen by my whip.

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** Could I just follow up on something that was raised earlier?

Just to clarify, among the reasons for proposing a pilot of 60 offices, do they include the amount of resources required and the time required to put this in place, as opposed to, obviously, going ahead right away with 338?

**Mr. Stéphan Aubé:** That's what we want to assess, sir, before we come back with a full implementation. We want to be able to measure the service expectations in the constituency offices, especially in remote regions. We want to make sure that we have the proper contracting vehicle and the proper partners in these areas. If we don't, we can make the necessary adjustments before we go in full, live production.

This is a standardized approach in our world. As Madam Chagger just said, the pilot will allow us to learn and make sure that we're ready once we go into production with all the services and all the proper support for the members.

● (1215)

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** Thank you very much.

Is it the will of the members of the Board of Internal Economy to approve this recommendation?

**Hon. Pablo Rodriguez:** Yes.

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** Thank you very much.

[*English*]

We will suspend for a moment. We have to go in camera to discuss the next item.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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